Using the DRDP (2015) with Children with Visual Impairments

The Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) (2015) is an authentic assessment based on ongoing observations of children in their daily routines and typical environments. This guide is designed to assist teachers and service providers in using the DRDP (2015) to conduct informed and meaningful assessments of children with visual impairments (VI) by better understanding:

1. The learning needs of children with visual impairments;
2. How an individual child's visual impairment influences the child's behavior, interactions, and learning; and
3. How to provide an appropriate learning environment that leads to a more accurate assessment of children's knowledge, behaviors, and skills.

This guide is a supplement to the guidance that appears in the DRDP (2015) Assessment Manual (draccess.org/assessors). It provides information about suggested practices that will facilitate appropriate assessment of young children with VI on the DRDP (2015). Please read the Introduction and Appendices in the Assessment Manual in their entirety, paying careful attention to the sections focused on the following topics:

- **Adaptations**: The DRDP (2015) includes a system of adaptations to be used for children with Individualized Family Serive Plans (IFSPs) and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) so that they can demonstrate what they know and can do, rather than be penalized by the presence of a disability. DRDP assessors need to be knowledgeable about using the adaptations identified for a child who is VI. For more information about adaptations, refer to appendix D in the Assessment Manual and to additional tools found on the Desired Results Access Project web site: draccess.org/adaptations
- **Collaboration**: An accurate assessment of a child with VI involves collaborating with the child's family and other service providers including teachers credentialed in visual impairments (TVI), orientation and mobility (O&M) instructors, and childcare providers. Refer to Appendix F of the DRDP (2015) Assessment Manual for further guidance on collaboration.
- **Universal Design**: The measures of the DRDP (2015) were developed by applying the principle of Universal Design so that *all* children can demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a variety of ways. For more information, refer to the Introduction of the DRDP (2015) Assessment Manual.
- **Mastery Criteria**: It is important to adhere to the DRDP (2015) criteria for demonstration of mastery when scoring the DRDP (2015). Sometimes a child with a VI will demonstrate a skill but in limited settings or inconsistently over time, which does not meet the criterion of mastery for rating measures of the DRDP (2015).

In addition to the information included in the Assessment manual, many useful resources are available at the Desired Results Access Project web site: draccess.org

Recommended Practices for Using the DRDP (2015) with Children with Visual Impairments

1. Become knowledgeable about the child's visual impairment

- Type and level of visual impairment
- Findings of the child's Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)
- Recommendations from the child's Learning Media Assessment (LMA)
- Prescribed corrective lenses and magnification devices
- Visual impairment with additional disabilities

2. Support the child's language and communication skills

- Obtain the child's full attention
- Maintain close proximity between the speaker and the child
- Offer time and prompts to help the child find or identify who is speaking
- Use facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonations that accurately convey the speaker's message
- Give the child time to respond to a question before repeating it
- Give the child sufficient opportunity to examine items through vision and touch
- Teach the child how to scan and respond to the visual environment
- Teach the child how to tactilely search for and explore materials
- Help the child develop listening skills
- Provide the child with an effective mode of communication
- Provide concrete experiences for the child to develop and demonstrate understanding of the meaning of words and what they represent
- Check frequently for understanding
- Be familiar with the child's home language

3. Provide additional support for the child relative to skills in the domain Approaches to Learning–Self-Regulation

- Help the child attend to people and things in the environment
- Teach the child to imitate
- Help the child learn how to regulate feelings and behaviors

4. Optimize the environment for observation

Optimize positioning

- Make sure the child's back is to the window or light source
- Provide preferential seating in groups

Optimize physical access

- Make sure that the environment is safe, accessible, and predictable
- Organize the environment to maximize peer interactions

Optimize visual access

- Provide optimal illumination
- Minimize visual distractions
- Use visual schedules
- Arrange the environment to support visual access
- Provide visual supports

Optimize auditory access

- Minimize auditory distractions to optimize participation and engagement
- Create quiet spaces
- Promote the child's participation in conversations with peers during group activities

Optimize tactile access

- Use real items whenever possible instead of plastic models or replicas
- Use 3D materials for art, numeracy, and other activities
- Add objects to visuals on schedules
- Label items with textures and braille
- Provide time for the child to handle and explore materials

5. Rating the measures of the DRDP (2015)

- Determine mastery
- Identify interests and preferences
- Be aware of prompt dependency
- Ensure access to appropriate reading and writing materials

1 Become knowledgeable about the child's visual impairment

- Type and level of visual impairment
- Findings of the child's Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)
- Recommendations from the child's Learning Media Assessment (LMA)
- Prescribed corrective lenses and magnification devices
- Visual impairment with additional disabilities

The child's type and level of visual impairment

The assessor needs to locate and understand information about the child's type and level of visual impairment and the resulting influence on the child's skills in order to make accurate observations for the DRDP (2015) assessment. This information includes accessing the child's ophthalmological report, Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) and Learning Media Assessment (LMA) as well as talking to the teacher credentialed in visual impairment (TVI) and family members who can explain these reports.

Types of visual impairment

The type of visual impairment will impact the child's ability to access visual information. Additionally, a child may have more than one type of visual impairment. These can be described as:

- **Decreased visual acuity**: causes blurry vision. Without corrective lenses a child with myopia (nearsightedness) will not be able to see distance objects clearly, and a child with hyperopia (farsightedness) will not be able to see close objects clearly.
- **Field loss**: may interfere with a child's central vision (what is seen looking straight ahead) or peripheral vision (what is seen at the side or outside the center of gaze) depending on where the loss occurs in the normal visual field. Assessors and teachers need to know how to position objects within the child's visual field so the child can see them.
- **Loss of contrast sensitivity**: affects the child's ability to see the difference between similar colors or the lightness and darkness of items.
- **Color blindness**: affects the child's ability to see differences between colors (red-green, blue-yellow, or complete color blindness). Color blindness occurs more frequently in boys (8.0%) than girls (0.5%).
- **Cortical visual impairment (CVI)**: results from neurological damage to the part of the brain that controls vision. A child with CVI may have normal functioning of the eyes but decreased visual responses. Some children have both CVI and another visual impairment.

Levels of visual impairment

The degree or severity of visual impairment will impact the child's ability to access visual information and influence the need to use other sensory (e.g., auditory and tactile) information. Broad categories of levels of visual impairment are:

- **Low vision**: indicates a visual acuity in the better eye with the best correction between 20/70 (i.e., sees at 20 feet what a child with normal vision sees at 70 feet) and 20/200 (i.e. sees at 20 feet what a child with normal vision sees at 200 feet). Normal visual acuity is 20/20.
- **Legally blind**: indicates a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best correction, or a visual field of less than 20°. Normal visual field is 160° - 180° horizontally and 120° vertically.
- **Functionally blind**: the child may have some vision but does not learn through visual media (e.g., pictures or print). This child functions like a child who is blind, needs tactile adaptations, and may require braille instruction. A child's learning style (visual, auditory or tactile) is determined through the Learning Media Assessment that

identifies the child's preferred sensory modes for obtaining information and recommends the appropriate instructional materials for learning to read and write. (Please see Appendix A for an example of an LMA).

- **Totally blind**: indicates a lack of light or form perception.

Different levels of vision loss in each eye

A child's depth perception (the ability to see relative distances of objects, spatial relationships of objects, and the world in three dimensions) requires binocular stereoscopic vision or stereopsis (good vision in both eyes). Depth perception is affected when a child has strabismus (eye turns in or out) or a difference in the level of vision in each eye. This child may have difficulty noticing changes in different surfaces (floor coverings, stairs, curbs) and with eye-hand coordination activities (catching a ball). This child benefits from verbal reminders and orientation and mobility (O&M) instruction for safe and independent travel.

Findings of the Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)

This assessment is usually conducted by a TVI or an O&M instructor to determine how a child uses vision during everyday activities. The FVA identifies how the child uses vision for near tasks (closer than 16 inches), intermediate tasks (16-36 inches) and distance tasks (more than 3 feet away). Procedures include a review of the child's records, interviews with teachers and the family, and observations of the child. Both formal measures (visual acuity, visual field, contrast sensitivity, color vision and light sensitivity) and informal measures (eye preference and finding an object in a picture) are used. The FVA includes recommendations to promote the effective use of vision through adaptations (e.g., additional lighting or the use of high contrast markers), and specialized instruction (e.g., learning to use a magnifier to look at print or pictures, or to scan among several items before making a choice).

Recommendations of the Learning Media Assessment (LMA)

The LMA is conducted by a TVI to assess a child's learning style or use of visual, tactile and auditory information and to select general instructional methods and materials, and literacy media for reading and writing. IDEA (2004) 34 CFR Section 300.346 (a) (2) (iii) and 20 U.S.C. 1414(d) require that the IEP for a child who is blind or visually impaired include instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the IEP team determines that braille is not appropriate based on an evaluation of the child's present and future literacy needs and skills, and appropriate media for reading and writing. The LMA addresses this requirement of the IEP. The FVA and LMA recommendations should be implemented when developing and providing instruction for a child with VI. See the example of an LMA for a preschooler with low vision for more information. (Please see Appendix A for an example of an LMA).

Prescribed corrective lenses and magnification device(s)

If a child has been prescribed glasses, contact lenses, and/or magnification technology, ensure that the devices are functioning optimally and that the child is using them consistently. Different types of magnifiers include hand-held, stand or illuminated magnifiers, or closed circuit television (video magnifier) that enlarges print or objects. When assessing a child with VI, be sure that the child is wearing the prescribed corrective lenses and has access to recommended magnification devices.

Visual impairment with additional disabilities

Some children have another disability in addition to a visual impairment. Assessors and other service providers should be knowledgeable about the child's visual impairment and overall development as well as the child's other area(s) of disability. Estimates indicate up to 65% of young children with visual impairments have another disability (Hatton, Ivy, & Boyer, 2013) and that many children with autism or developmental disabilities are at risk for a visual impairment (Ikeda, Davitt, Utmann, Maxim, & Cruz, 2013; Nelson, Jensen & Skov, 2008). In order to provide optimal learning opportunities for these children and to obtain accurate information about their skills and abilities, assessors should collaborate with members of the child's educational team, including the family, and implement adaptations or strategies specific to the additional area(s) of disability as well as those specific to the visual impairment.

2 Support the child's language and communication skills

- Obtain the child's full attention
- Maintain close proximity between the speaker and the child
- Offer time and prompts to help the child find or identify who is speaking
- Use facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonations that accurately convey the speaker's message
- Give the child time to respond to a question before repeating it
- Give the child sufficient opportunity to examine items through vision and touch
- Teach the child how to scan and respond to the visual environment
- Teach the child how to tactilely search for and explore materials
- Help the child develop listening skills
- Provide the child with an effective mode of communication
- Provide concrete experiences for the child to develop and demonstrate understanding of the meaning of words and what they represent
- Check frequently for understanding
- Be familiar with the child's home language

Appropriate communication must take place during all parts of a child's daily routine. Ensure that the child understands what is occurring in the environment. Strategies to help a child communicate should be in place when assessing a child with VI on all measures of the DRDP (2015) and are of particular importance for the language and literacy measures. It is essential to use the child's mode of communication (i.e., speech, augmentative or alternative communication devices (AAC), or braille) when observing the child's language and literacy skills. Below are recommendations for supporting the child's language and communication skills in the environment.

Obtain the child's full attention

Gain the child's auditory attention before speaking to the child. Some children might need to be prompted to look at the speaker with a tap on their shoulder or by holding a preferred object within the child's visual field. When speaking to a child during observations, the assessor should remember to obtain the child's attention, say the child's name and face the child.

Maintain close proximity between the speaker and the child

Keep the distance between the speaker and the child between 3-6 feet and within the child's visual field. For the child who is blind, keep the distance within an arm's reach to facilitate the child's engagement in the conversation.

Offer time and prompts to help the child find the person who is speaking

Some children with VI need more time and a visual or auditory prompt to find the person who is speaking. In a group activity, point to and name the person who is speaking so that the child can identify and attend to that person.

Use facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonation that accurately convey the speaker's message

Although some emotional facial expressions seem to be innate, children with low vision need to see, understand, and use

conventional facial expressions and gestures in social interactions. Children who are blind may need to tactilely perceive facial expressions and gestures by touching the faces and hands of others in order to understand what is being conveyed. While this is happening, the adult should describe the feelings being expressed based on the context. (i.e., "Sam is sad because he can't find his favorite toy.").

Give the child time to respond to a question

Give the child an additional 3-5 seconds to respond to a question before repeating it. Children with VI may need more time to process verbal information. Consider repeating the question in a slightly different way (i.e., "Where is the trike?" and "Can you find the trike?") and observe the child's nonverbal communication. A child with VI may communicate interest by becoming quiet and listening, or by reaching or leaning toward the speaker or a named item. A child may only attend to one action, communication exchange, or person at a time. Identify specific strategies to encourage a child's responses to interactions. When engaged in an activity, some children may need more time or visual, tactile, or auditory prompts to shift attention to the speaker.

Give the child sufficient opportunity to examine items through vision and touch

Some children with VI need more time to visually or tactilely inspect items before asking questions, making comments, or responding to others. As an example when reading the book, "The Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle, the teacher asks the children to identify the food that the caterpillar ate throughout the story by talking about the pictures on the page of the book and matching real materials or representatives of the real materials to the pictures. A child who has low vision, will need more time than her sighted classmates to handle and identify the real objects or representative objects that relate to the story.

Teach the child how to scan and respond to the visual environment

Children with low vision may be visual learners. Visual access to non-verbal communication (such as appropriate facial expressions and eye contact) is critical for a child to engage in successful interactions and social problem solving. Make sure that the child is in a position that facilitates orientation to the face of the person who is communicating. Remind the child to scan the environment so as not to miss out on important information or communication opportunities.

Teach the child how to tactilely search for and explore materials

Some children with VI may be tactile learners. Provide tactile access by placing materials within the child's reach and encouraging the child to touch and explore them. Help the child use systematic tactile exploration procedures such as moving his or her hand(s) from left to right or top to bottom over the material.

Help the child develop listening skills

Some children with VI may need specific instruction to develop listening skills (Barclay, 2012). They may need these skills in order to communicate and to understand the meaning of sounds in the environment. Eliminate or reduce competing background noise so that children can maximize their understanding and participation during social interactions and communication with others.

Provide the child with an effective mode of expressive communication

It may be necessary to provide some children with VI with an alternative means of communication. This may involve augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) systems. Augmentative communication supplements unintelligible or limited speech while alternative communication is used by those who do not have spoken language. However, the same types of communication systems (e.g., objects, pictures, manual signs, speech generating devices) are used for either augmentative or alternative communication.

Provide concrete experiences for the child to develop and demonstrate understanding of the meaning of words and what they represent

Children with limited vision need opportunities to handle and manipulate objects to learn about their similarities and differences, characteristics, or functions before understanding descriptive words or categories. For example, before expecting preschoolers with VI to understand prepositions such as in, on, under, or behind, they must have actual and multiple concrete experiences to develop an understanding of what these words mean. These concepts may be more easily developed by the child's experiences with moving his or her body in a certain position (e.g., standing "beside" a chair), rather than relying on the placement of an object "beside" a chair, before identifying "beside" in a visual or tactile drawing or explaining the word "beside".

Check frequently for understanding

A child may be distracted by environmental sounds or focused on visual or tactile aspects of an activity and consequently may not follow conversations or may miss some elements of a direction being given. It may look like the child is not attending or not able to follow directions. The teacher may need to individualize the way in which group instructions are given and make sure that the child has access to all of the information through his or her communication mode.

Be familiar with the child's home language

Children with VI may come from homes where more than one language is spoken. The education team needs to know what language(s) are spoken in the child's home, what language the child uses and understands, and how to communicate with the family in the home language. It is important to gauge the influence of multiple languages on a child's acquisition and use of language for purposes of assessment and instructional planning. The educational team must develop a plan for communicating with family members in those situations where the home language of the child's family is other than spoken English. Communication with the parents of young children with VI is crucial and may require the services of a qualified interpreter.

3 Provide additional support for the child relative to skills in the domain Approaches to Learning–Self-Regulation

- Help the child attend to people and things in the environment
- Teach the child to imitate
- Help the child learn how to regulate feelings and behaviors

Many children with VI need additional support relative to learning self-regulation skills. A visual impairment interferes with easy visual recognition, discrimination, and identification of people, actions, and things in the environment. With limited or no access to the security that vision provides, some children with VI have difficulty regulating their feelings and behaviors.

Help the child attend to people and things in the environment

Children with VI benefit from specific opportunities to learn about their social and physical environment. For example, children need to learn the names of adults and peers, recognize their voices, and identify what they are doing. Listening and other identification games help children develop these skills. Similarly, children must become familiar with their physical environments. They need to be oriented to the room arrangement and where materials are stored. An O&M instructor should collaborate with the team and family to help the child develop strategies to travel confidently throughout the environment and locate desired objects.

Teach the child how to imitate

Young children learn many physical actions (e.g., certain facial expressions, waving bye-bye, or playing with a telephone) by seeing others engage in them. Children with VI need specific opportunities and instruction to learn through imitation. Point out these actions and encourage the child to imitate by providing a model. A child with low vision must be close enough to the model to see the action, and the child who is blind needs to feel the model's face, hands, or body. Use hand-over-hand guidance to show a child how to perform an action (e.g., taking a child's hand and moving it through waving bye-bye). However, this prompt should be used cautiously and faded as soon as possible so the child can use these actions independently. When possible, use hand-under-hand guidance (placing the child's hand on top of your hand when waving bye-bye) which is more likely to support a child's development of initiation and independent action (Chen & Downing, 2006).

Help the child learn how to regulate feelings and behaviors

A clear, predictable routine increases children's comfort and decreases anxiety created by an unpredictable or confusing environment. Use visual and object schedules throughout the day (outlined in the following section). Some children engage in stereotypic or repetitive behaviors (e.g., flapping hands in front of eyes, staring at lights, or rocking back and forth). These behaviors probably serve a purpose for the child such as obtaining attention from adults, increasing stimulation if bored, or coping with an overstimulating environment (Molloy & Rowe, 2011). It is essential to comment on the child's appropriate behaviors and when possible ignore or redirect inappropriate behaviors. Identify the purpose of these inappropriate behaviors and replace them with more socially acceptable ones. For example, if a child stares at lights, learning to use an App on a tablet or computer would be a meaningful replacement. Similarly, increased opportunities for physical activity (e.g., swinging on the playground or dancing to music) may decrease a child's rocking behavior. If a child becomes overstimulated by certain activities, allow the child to take a break or teach a calming strategy such as taking deep breaths. Children must participate in meaningful activities to decrease boredom and repetitive behaviors. Use the child's interests and preferences to support participation in activities. Children are likely to participate in less-preferred activities if they involve favorite objects or scaffolds. For example, a child who enjoys songs but not cleaning up the lunch area may more readily participate in the clean-up activity when an adult sings "this is the way we pick up the trash, pick up the trash, pick up the trash," after eating lunch. Other strategies that motivate a child's participation and regulation of behavior are offering choices of items or activities, and providing naturally reinforcing consequences, e.g., clean up toys first (a less preferred activity) then listen to music (a preferred activity).

4

Optimize the environment for observation

Optimize positioning

- Make sure the child's back is to the window or light source
- Provide preferential seating in groups

Optimize physical access

- Make sure that the environment is safe, accessible, and predictable
- Organize the environment to maximize peer interactions

Optimize visual access

- Provide optimal illumination
- Minimize visual distractions
- Arrange the environment to support visual access
- Provide visual supports
- Use visual schedules

Optimize auditory access

- Minimize auditory distractions to optimize participation and engagement
- Create quiet spaces
- Promote the child's participation in conversations with peers during group activities

Optimize tactile access

- Use real items whenever possible instead of plastic models or replicas
- Use 3D materials for art, numeracy, and other activities
- Add objects to visuals on schedules
- Label items with textures and braille
- Provide time for the child to handle and explore materials

Many children with VI benefit when environments are organized to facilitate access to tactile, auditory and visual information. Some children with low vision may be sensitive to shadows, moving objects, background noises, and/or light, so these distractions should be reduced or eliminated. The following suggestions should be used in the child's daily routines and activities:

Optimize positioning

- **Make sure the child's back is to the window or light source**: Ensure that the child with low vision is not looking into the light source or distracted by glare. Use shades and coverings to reduce glare from windows and avoid materials with shiny surfaces (e.g., glossy paper).
- **Provide preferential seating in groups**: Position the child 3-6 feet from the speaker. A semicircle is best for groups so that the child can listen to and find the speaker.

Optimize physical access

- **Make sure that the environment is safe, accessible, and predictable**: Clear paths to enable the child to move

independently from one area of the classroom to another. Keep doors completely open or closed. Consult with the child's O&M instructor to organize travel routes around the child's environments. Keep the room arrangement consistent. When changes are made, be sure to orient the child to the new room arrangement.

- **Organize the environment to maximize peer interactions**: The physical environment and learning areas should be organized to maximize opportunities for peer interactions throughout the day. Adults may facilitate peer interactions by providing materials that support play, encouraging children with similar interests to play together, or commenting on what one child is doing and inviting another to join in.

Optimize visual access

- **Provide optimal illumination**: This may include natural, bright or dim lighting depending on the child's vision. For certain visual tasks, a lamp that provides direct lighting on materials may help a child's use of functional vision.
- **Minimize visual distractions**: Avoid competing light from windows, shadows or unnecessary movements of people or objects that may distract children who rely on visual information.
- **Arrange the environment to support visual access**: Computers and play areas should be away from or shielded from direct lighting that causes glare. Some children increase their visual attention if a cardboard study carrel is placed around the computer screen blocking other sources of light. In group activities, place materials within the child's visual field. Children should have the flexibility to move closer to see pictures or demonstrations.
- **Provide visual supports**: Use high contrast pictures and objects (e.g., black and white; black and yellow; or blue and yellow). When needed, provide a high contrast solid colored background (paper or mat) for toys on the floor. Use large, bold print with spacing between letters. Provide magnification devices when recommended. Refer to information about visual supports included in the child's FVA and LMA.
- **Use visual schedules**: Provide easy-to-see photos, drawings, or objects that represent daily activities. Refer to them during transition times and for all daily routines. For example, involve children in removing the picture of a completed activity so it is easy to see what activity is next. For children with low vision, pictures illustrating classroom rules also help a child understand classroom expectations.

Optimize auditory access

- **Minimize auditory distractions**: To optimize participation and engagement in learning, limit background noise such as sounds from the street or classroom, air conditioner, or forced air heating. Eliminate background music in the room particularly when the child is focused on listening and speaking.
- **Create quiet spaces**: Quiet spaces can optimize the child's participation and engagement in learning. These spaces may also be used to help a child calm down when confused or overstimulated.
- **Promote the child's participation in conversations with peers in group activities**: Let the child know who is speaking or which child is taking a turn in an activity. Provide a short verbal description of what the other children are doing. Make comments and ask questions that will encourage children to interact with each other.

Optimize tactile access

- **Use real items whenever possible instead of plastic models or replicas**: Learning opportunities with real items are essential for young children to build an accurate understanding of the meanings of words, particularly when learning vocabulary. For example, consider the many sensory characteristics of a real orange compared to the limited representation of a plastic orange. If a young child has limited language and experiences, tactile replicas (e.g., small plastic models of animals or a raised line drawing of a plant) are unlikely to be understood or provide meaningful information.
- **Use 3D materials for art, numeracy, and other activities**: Children are more likely to participate in activities when materials are interesting to them. Art activities that are primarily visual (e.g., gluing different paper shapes on paper) are unlikely to engage a child with VI. Making a collage with different textures (e.g., stones, leaves, or small twigs) is more interesting and invites handling and exploration.
- **Add objects to visuals on schedules**: Many young children with limited visual skills benefit from concrete

representations on daily schedules. For example, if a child uses a straw to drink, a drinking straw may be attached beside the picture that represents lunch.

- **Label items with textures and braille**: Provide a tactile alternative to environmental print for a child with VI. For example, add a texture or braille to the printed name on the child's cubby, to the title on a cover of a homemade tactile book, or add braille labels to the daily schedule. The TVI should help provide these labels.
- **Provide time for child to handle and explore materials**: It takes more time to tactilely examine an object than to visually examine, so children with VI will need even more opportunities and time to handle and manipulate materials.

5 Rating the measures of the DRDP (2015)

- Determine mastery
- Identify interests and preferences
- Be aware of prompt dependency
- Ensure access to appropriate reading and writing materials

Determine mastery

A developmental level is mastered if a child demonstrates the knowledge, skills and behaviors defined at that level consistently over time and in different situations or settings (DRDP, 2015).

Some children may demonstrate skills in a specific routine but not generalize the skill to similar routines or different settings. For example, a child may have just learned to count five objects using one-to-one correspondence during center time but is not able to do this with objects during snack. A child may identify letters or sing the words to a song when interacting with one staff member and not another, or select a car from a group of toys when it is large and blue but not when it is small and red. Assessors should consider what skill is being observed and provide multiple opportunities across people, materials, and activities for the child to demonstrate the skill in order to determine the child's level of mastery.

A level can be rated as mastered even when earlier levels on the measure have not been observed.

Identify interests and preferences

Use a child's preferred objects and activities to observe the skills being assessed. Building on a child's interests and preferences motivates the child's engagement and participation and increases the likihood of observing the child's skill levels more accurately.

Be aware of prompt dependency

Be aware of any verbal or physical prompts that may elicit a child's correct response. Prompted behaviors do not reflect a child's true level of performance. Provide opportunities for the child to demonstrate the target behavior without any prompts. Remember that prompts are not considered to be adaptations.

Ensure access to appropriate reading and writing materials

For a more accurate rating of the child's developmental level, especially when observing the child's skills for the literacy measures (LLD 5-10), make sure the child has access to the books and writing utensils recommended in the LMA. (Please see Appendix A for an example of an LMA.)

Summary

A visual impairment can affect a child's ability to successfully interact and engage in the environment and as a result, can affect the results of the DRDP (2015) assessment. The assessor should obtain information about the child prior to observation by communicating with the family and other service providers and by reviewing information in the IEP and the child's records. The assessor must be knowledgeable about the child's type and level of visual impairment to understand the child's behavior. The assessor or someone working with the assessor must be able to communicate with the child during observations so that the child will understand and will be understood. The assessor must optimize visual and tactile aspects of the environment and ensure adaptations are in place to facilitate the child's participation in activities and the environment for accurate observation.

For more information about the DRDP (2015):

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Resources

Family Connect http://www.familyconnect.org

An online multimedia resource for families of children with visual impairments created by the American Foundation for the Blind and the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments.

Literacy for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss http://literacy.nationaldb.org

Provides a literacy skills checklist and strategies for a range of abilities from building a foundation, early emergent literacy, emergent literacy to expanding literacy.

Paths to Literacy for Students who are Blind or Visually Impaired http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/emergent-literacy/resources

Joint project of Perkins School for the Blind and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide online resources and activities related to literacy for students with visual impairment and those with additional disabilities.

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Appendix A

Learning Media Assessment

Student's Name: Marcello Garcia
Date of Birth: 12-11-13 Age: 3 years, 3 months Grade: Preschool
Date of Assessment/Report: 03-05-2017 Assessor: Tina Simmons, TVI
Parent/Guardian: Juan and Maria Garcia
Primary Language: English

Purpose of Assessment

To conduct a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) that provides comprehensive information on Marcello's learning and literacy media needs.

Assessment Procedures

- Observations in the general education preschool classroom
- Observations in the special education resource room for preschoolers with VI
- Interview with parent and general education preschool teacher
- Review of selected previous assessment results; for example, use prior DRDP assessments and other records

Observations

Marcello was observed on four occasions: twice in his general education classroom, once in the resource room, and once outdoors in the school garden. His individual behaviors were recorded as well as how he used visual, tactile, and auditory information. Each of these areas are discussed below under Learning Media Assessment Components.

Findings from Parent Interview

Mrs. Garcia reported that Marcello shows interest in looking at short videos and stories on an iPad. He enjoys looking at books with an adult and will point to or touch a picture upon request, e.g., "show me the ball" or "point to the giraffe." When looking at a book, Marcello looks at images for a moment, shifts gaze, and then responds accurately 90-100% of the time. In other situations when Mrs. Garcia asks him to do something, he tends to just repeat what his mother says so she is unsure if he understands.

Findings from General Education Preschool Teacher Interview

Wilma Wilson asked for suggestions on ways to engage Marcello in group activities as he is more responsive when she works with him individually. Although Marcello enjoys books, he has difficulty sitting still and responding to her questions during story time.

Review of Previous Assessments

Marcello received early intervention services for one hour a week from a teacher credentialed in visual impairments (TVI) until he was 36 months old. He demonstrated steady gains in all areas of development with some delays in communication, as evidenced by the IT DRDP (2015). Marcello also continued to demonstrate tactile sensitivities. His assessment for preschool services determined eligibility for occupational therapy, speech therapy, and vision services. Marcello currently receives 30 minutes of occupational therapy and 30 minutes of speech therapy each week embedded by the therapists within the classroom routine. Vision services are provided in the resource room for 30 minutes a day.

Learning Media Assessment Components

- Use of Sensory Channels
- Selection of General Learning Media
- Selection of Literacy Media

Observation Findings

Use of Sensory Channels

Marcello uses vision as the primary source for gathering sensory information and uses touch and hearing as secondary sources. His primary mode of learning is through vision as demonstrated by his curiosity about his environment. He moves closer to people, objects and activities so he can see them. It seems that Marcello's secondary channel is tactile as he gathers information by touching and exploring with his hands particularly when he is within arm's reach of the target objects. When he hears speech, he tends to imitate what he hears. Marcello responds to environmental sounds by turning or moving in the direction of a familiar sound such as when someone calls his name.

Selection of General Learning Media

Marcello is most responsive to learning materials presented at a distance of 1-2 feet that require use of hearing, such as environmental sounds and music. He is less responsive to learning materials such as pictures, visual cards, or objects that are presented more than 2 feet away. He is more responsive to teaching methods presented at a distance if they include auditory stimuli, oral instructions, verbal prompts, or verbal guidance compared to visual teaching methods that include pointing, gesturing, or facial expressions.

Marcello enjoys listening to stories and books read aloud if he can hold the book, turn the pages, and explore the tactile components. He was observed turning away from the teacher as she read a story to the group when he was sitting 5-6 feet away from her. He was easily distracted and wanted to touch or look at what his peers beside him were doing.

Marcello is most responsive to learning materials presented within arm's reach so he can manipulate them, e.g., blocks, magnets, and connecting objects. However, he does not like to manipulate materials with different wet/dry textures such as playdough, clay, paint, slime, and dirt. When the class made "slime" Marcello was only willing to help with the water; he actively refused to touch any other ingredients and would only briefly touch the slime after it was placed in the Ziplock bag.

Selection of Literacy Media

Marcello should have all books/print and any literacy materials in large print and/or with a tactile component (i.e., objects related to the story). Although most books in preschool are in large print, the majority do not have any tactile features (i.e., textures or objects)., Marcello needs opportunities to develop his literacy skills through large print to ensure access. He identified the letters of his name in capital letters and identified m, c, and o in lower case when presented in 36-point type or larger. Marcello is also able to identify his numbers 1 - 10 in 36-point type or larger when presented 6-12 inches from him.

Summary and Recommendations

- Marcello uses a combination of the visual, auditory, and tactile sensory channels for learning. He demonstrated the use of vision as a primary channel and the use of hearing and touch as secondary channels.
- Marcello demonstrated the motor skills necessary to read with a CCTV (Closed Circuit TV) and to begin

to learn primary writing with the use of a bold pen. He should have a range of options for paper with sharp contrast, tactile lines, and primary-style writing paper (upper and lower solid lines with middle dotted line).

- Marcello needs a variety of options for early literacy activities. Given a full repertoire of literacy tools, he can then choose – with instruction and guidance – which option(s) will allow the most efficient way to complete a given task. The following literacy tools should be among the options considered by the educational team:

  Reading tools

  - ○ Increased use of large print
  - ○ Use of CCTV
  - ○ Use of magnification on computer, or in tablet use

  Writing tools

  - ○ Using a black or blue felt tip pen for writing
  - ○ Use of teacher/instructional assistant writing for student
  - ○ Use of primary-style writing paper with tactile/raised lines

- Marcello uses all of his senses for learning, and he needs repeated and meaningful learning experiences in real contexts. Students with low vision often miss valuable information because vision alone may provide inadequate or inaccurate information. They benefit from universal design for learning practices that involve multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression and action.

Recommendations related to vision use

- Select materials that maximize light absorption (e.g., matte finish rather than glossy finish photos).
- Be sensitive to changing light conditions outdoors. A dark colored visor or a hat with a minimum 3-inch brim will eliminate some of the glare experienced outdoors.
- Simple and regular patterns are more easily viewed than complex ones. Provide regular spacing between items to avoid visual clutter and overwhelming sensory input.
- Whenever possible in the preschool setting, contrast should be maximized to facilitate greater independence and increased use of vision.
- Marcello should have preferential seating when in a group activity and when activities are presented to ensure he has access to information. He should sit in the front of the group so that when a book or materials are shown to the group, he can see them, touch any objects presented, and show the teacher what he can or cannot see.

Submitted March 10, 2017

Tina Simmons

Tina Simmons, TVI